Finer Things

Posted originally on the Archive of Our Own at http://archiveofourown.org/works/11175000.

Rating:	Teen And Up Audiences
Archive Warning:	No Archive Warnings Apply
Categories:	F/F, M/M
Fandom:	Hannibal (TV)
Relationships:	Will Graham/Hannibal Lecter, Alana Bloom/Beverly Katz
Characters:	Will Graham, Hannibal Lecter, Alana Bloom, Beverly Katz, Jack Crawford, Will Graham's Dogs
Additional Tags:	Chef Hannibal, Hannibal Loves Will, Will is a Mess, Asexuality, Alternate Universe - Creatures & Monsters, Hannibal is Not a Cannibal, Sort Of, Mental Instability, Alternate Universe - Fae, Fluff
Language:	English
Stats:	Published: 2017-06-12 Completed: 2017-08-03 Words: 16,626 Chapters: 5/5

Finer Things

by proser

Summary

Used to living in the rough and hunting down evil, Will Graham refuses to let his guard down around the wealthy (and slightly perturbing) Hannibal Lecter. Something is wrong, and Will is determined to figure out what it is.

Smitten, Hannibal is happy to let him.

Notes

I'm not exactly new to this fandom; I saw the first two seasons back in early 2015. I'm rewatching it now, and I'm almost done with the first season. My memories of what exactly goes down is hazy, but I'm obsessed with these characters, so I figured I couldn't go wrong with an AU.

See the end of the work for more notes

The Dragon's Head

Will had fallen asleep at four in the morning, and had slept in until nearly three in the afternoon. Typically, he would not allow himself to fall victim to such an adolescent sleep schedule.

However, things were not *typical* like they used to be.

The past two months had been primarily reclamation. Moving back to a civilized, stationary life was jarring, and not only because he had already suffered a mental break. He was paranoid after his time spent hunting, and without the hunting itself to help him cope, he felt unsafe.

He was never safe.

Of course, everyone told him that he was. Jack Crawford had gone through the effort to secure the area surrounding Will's home, and there was always security on hand "close by" to intervene if anything were to happen. The doctors assured him that nothing was inside of him anymore, that he was clean, that nothing would be coming back.

But he still *felt* it. It was there, or a shadow of it was, crawling around in the back corners of his mind, telling him things he would never tell himself.

Alana assured him it was simply PTSD, but Will was never quite so sure.

He had been unable to sleep the night before because of the pain. He had been given narcotics to ease it, but he wanted to prove to himself that he was strong enough without them.

It had been two months, after all. Wounds heal. Pain ceases.

Not for him, though. The surgical remnants of his affliction continued to pulse and ache unbearably unless he took the big, fat, pink pills.

He had caved in at four, and the painkillers knocked him out for the next eleven hours.

By the time that Beverly called, it was four o'clock. He had done nothing but make sure that his two dogs were taken care of. They were fed, watered, and taken for a short walk. He was sitting on the porch when his cell phone rang, and it alarmed him.

A shiver rattled down his spine, and he took the phone from his pocket.

"Hello?"

"Oh, good. You're awake."

It was Beverly, of course, her tone saturated with dry humor.

"I'm usually awake by now," he muttered, resting his elbow on his knee.

From the other end of the line, Beverly snorted. "Not lately."

"Consider today an exception, then."

"Lucky for us I guess," she said. "You ready to go?"

He frowned and scanned the fenced yard, making sure that both Buster and Winston were fine. They were, of course. There was nothing to hurt them in his yard besides the occasionally angry squirrel, and even those would have trouble getting through.

"Go where?" he asked her. "Nothing's wrong, is it?"

Beverly sighed. "Alana said this would happen."

"What? What happened?"

"Nothing, Will. You're fine." She sighed again, and the disappointment reverberated through the cell's speakers. "You just agreed a few weeks ago that you would join us for dinner tonight."

"You can't hold me accountable for something I said that long ago."

"Fine," she said. "I'll hold you accountable now. Be ready in two hours. Dress nice. Alana and I will pick you up."

"But I never--"

She hung up before he could spit out his reply.

He grimaced and shoved the phone back into his pocket. Getting up, he grumbled, "I liked it better when I was off the grid."

Winston looked up at him, let out a soft bark, and trotted over to join him. Buster quickly followed, and they entered the house. He was careful to lock the door behind them.

Alana and Beverly showed up at five as promised.

Will wasn't sure at first, though. He didn't recognize the car, and lurked behind the curtain with a gun until he was *absolutely* sure it was his friends walking up to his door.

They didn't see through his paranoia, either.

When he opened the door, both women had their arms crossed.

"A gun, Will? Really?" Alana demanded.

Will looked past them, narrowing his eyes at the green Subaru. "I don't remember seeing that car."

"It's the same car we've driven every other time we've seen you," Alana said, and there was something in her voice that was sick with sympathy.

He was silent, staring past them in suspicion. He studied the license plate, and then felt settled.

"The plates are right."

Beverly gave an agitated sigh and cleared her throat. "You ready to go, Will?"

He looked down to check and make sure he was wearing shoes. He had forgotten the week before, and the results were unfortunate. The dirty, frozen feet weren't so much of a problem as was the fact that he didn't notice until he had returned to the house.

"Do I need to bring anything?" he asked.

"No," Alana said.

"Maybe something nicer than a tweed jacket," said Beverly.

Alana cleared her throat. "You're fine, Will. Thank you for coming with us."

"Don't speak so soon."

Both Will and Beverly had muttered that.

The car ride was about an hour long. Will was antsy the entire time, and couldn't help but mutter under his breath whenever an uncomfortable thought passed over him. Every time, Alana would tell him to take a deep breath and relax.

She wasn't his psychiatrist, but she was more effective than the one he saw at the hospital.

Still, there was very little anyone could do by the time they arrived at their destination.

"No," Will said, instinctively clutching the seat. He couldn't find a grip, and he grew panicked. "No, no, no. You--you can't make me go in there."

His pulse was hammering and his breath accelerated quickly. His head began to pound.

Alana kept calm and continued driving once the elaborate iron gate swung open. It was electronically controlled, but the motion was seemingly sentient. Behind it, one of the largest mansions in the state of Maryland presented itself.

Will saw dozens of windows peering down at him, almost none of them lit. The front doors were elaborate, almost like those of a Renaissance cathedral.

Between them and the monster of a house was a large driveway surrounded by an elaborate, near-exotic garden. Will forced himself to swallow some of his fear as he counted at least nine plants he recognized that could be used in dangerous rituals.

He realized he could barely hear over the sound of his own pulse in his ears, and that Beverly was trying to talk to him as Alana parked the car.

"I know what you're thinking," she said. "Will, you're fine. Nothing here is going to hurt you. You're safe. Come on, Will. Will?"

He stared at her, hyperventilating, seeing her but also seeing straight through her. The grounds were alive, and they were not friendly.

He didn't notice her reaching out to him until she had already grasped his knee, her fingers digging into the flesh around his joint. He cried out and jerked away from her, and instinctively snatched her wrist so she could not touch him again.

And then, he felt calm.

His racing pulse quieted itself and his breathing returned to normal. He realized there was now clarity where he hadn't even noticed his vision was blurred.

He dropped Beverly's wrist, and she yanked it back into her lap.

"You good, Graham?" she asked.

He nodded, and took a deep, slow breath. "I'm fine," he said. "I just got riled up for a second."

Alana opened her door and stepped out, and so did Beverly. Hesitantly, Will followed suit, slowly stepping onto the smooth pavement of the driveway.

They were directly in front of the enormous front doors, and there were no other cars outside to be seen.

He pushed down the unease swelling in his gut.

"Before we go in," Alana said, trying to look Will in the eyes, "can you tell me how you're feeling?"

"I'm fine now," Will said, chewing on his lip.

"What caused that little hissy fit, anyway?" Beverly asked, both eyebrows raised.

Alana hushed her, and in that soothing way of hers, she said, "Did you see something, Will?"

He swallowed and began to push past them. "Nothing," he said. Dryly, he added, "I'm just not usually one for fine dining."

He approached the doors, and Alana and Beverly mumbled to each other behind him. They caught up to him at the door, where he found himself being stared down by the dragon in the door knocker.

"Hell of a design, right?" Beverly asked, lifting the hooped knocker cast into the shape of flames erupting from the nostrils of the serpentine beast. She struck the door, and the resulting sound was loud and ringing.

"Right," Will laughed, uneasy.

Alana looked at him from the corner of her eye. "Our friend has a very fine taste."

If by fine you mean pompous and unnecessary, Will thought.

Out loud, he asked, "Who is this friend, anyhow? You say he's the one cooking?"

Before he could get an answer, both massive doors swung open.

A tall man with olive skin and frighteningly dark eyes stood before him. His suit was impeccable, without a single loose thread or wrinkle. He smelled like too much time and money.

The man's face crinkled into a smile. He wasn't old, but he certainly wasn't young. He took good care of himself, it seemed.

Will grimaced.

"You must be Will Graham," the man said, warmly. He stepped to the side and gestured for them to enter. "Come in, please." His voice was rich with a European accent that took Will back to days hunting in Austria.

"Brave of you to invite in a man you don't know," Will grumbled. He meant it to be quiet, but the man heard him.

"Your friends speak highly of you, Mr. Graham. I have no reservations when allowing you into my home."

Before crossing the threshold, Will's eyes scanned over the foyer. There was nothing prominently occult in nature besides the doors themselves, but it did little to quell his anxieties.

"Dr. Bloom, Ms. Katz," the man continued, ushering the women into his home. "It is so wonderful to see you again."

He kissed them each on the cheek, and they returned the gesture.

"It's good to see you too, Hannibal," Alana hummed.

"It'll be even better to see your cooking," Beverly chuckled.

The three stood facing Will, expectantly. There was a moment of silence which Will took advantage of, working to assess his surroundings more.

Then, Alana cleared her throat. "Will," she said, "this is our friend, Hannibal Lecter. He's been kind enough to take some time out of his *very busy* schedule to cook and join us for dinner."

Will nodded, but said nothing.

The man, Hannibal, laughed. "I'm far from busy, Alana. It is my pleasure to spend the evening with you three."

The women smiled at him, and Will felt another wave of discomfort wash over him. He groped in his coat pocket for his bottle of pills. When he unscrewed the lid, Hannibal put a hand on his shoulder.

"Would you like some water for that, Mr. Graham?" he inquired. "I have been made aware of your condition, of course, and I hope to ensure your comfort."

Will looked up at him as he threw a pill into his mouth, chewed it, and swallowed. He rarely made eye contact, but when he did, it was to make a point.

Something swam behind Hannibal's eyes, and he smiled again. He was so chillingly polite, it felt beyond unnatural.

"Well," Hannibal said. "I will lead you to the dining room, and I will fetch drinks."

He began walking through the foyer, with long and poised strides.

Will watched carefully, looking for any clue that could tell him exactly *what* this Hannibal Lecter was. There was nothing, however, that spelled out "creature," and the inside of the house was innocuous.

Well, as innocuous as the pinnacle of luxury could be.

Beautiful paintings of tantalizing men and decadent women hung on the walls, and the floor shone with the promise of polished mahogany. Fine furniture gathered in the next room over, and a beautiful carpet-lined staircase spiraled up to the next floor.

Everything was so exquisite, so *posh,* it was repulsive.

Sinful.

That shadow of a thing at the corner of his mind whispered, *A dragon and his hoard.*

Will knew there were no dragons in North America anymore, however. It was much more likely that he had willingly entered a devil's gate, which was much, much worse.

A sharp elbow jammed into his side as they passed the staircase.

"Can you try and be a little less paranoid?" Beverly demanded.

Alana narrowed her eyes at him, critical of him as well. "Hannibal is a wonderful person, Will. We wouldn't have brought you here if you were in danger."

"Danger is everywhere," muttered Will.

Hannibal looked over his shoulder and flashed a smile, either oblivious or ignoring their conversation. Will had a strong suspicion that it was the latter.

"The dining room is right this way," he informed them. "Take any of the seats I have set out for you. I will return in a moment."

Hannibal turned into another room, presumably the kitchen. Alana led the way to the dining room, an air of excitement surrounding her.

Will grimaced once more as it occurred to him that his friends genuinely *enjoyed* this place.

They entered the dining room. Unlike the past few rooms, it was not electrically lit. The curtains were opened to let in the late autumn moonlight from large windows. A fireplace crackled and illuminated the further half of the room, which was much smaller than Will had anticipated.

The entire room, in fact, was much humbler than anything he had seen of the Lecter house so far. The floors were still a very fine wood, but it was different, somehow. There was no less care or attention given to it, but something about the room...

It felt old, Will realized. It was as if he had crossed into a different time.

Large candles were mounted on the walls, burning golden. More candles decorated the table, which was dressed with what appeared to be cuttings from the garden. Some were dried, and some were fresh, but none of them were used for any notable rituals that he knew of.

Beverly and Alana had already sat down at the table next to each other, which of course meant that Will would be sat next to Hannibal.

The table was small and rectangular, meant to sit six people, perhaps. Neither head of the table was set, which seemed to be some sort of gesture. Another suspiciously considerate action on the part of Hannibal Lecter.

Will sat down across from Beverly, hoping that she would be kind enough to spare him any intense gazes. The chair he sat in was expertly carved, and comfortable despite its rigid appearance.

He took the silk napkin from the woven placemat, and his hand grazed the surface of the table.

He felt something strange.

He wasn't sure what.

Hannibal entered a moment later, carrying a small tea set. He stood behind Will and poured the kettle's contents into the tea cup he provided. The tea was an orange color, the lighting making it look lively and full of spirit.

"Holy basil and rose hip tea for you, Mr. Graham," he said. "I would not want to be responsible for any negative reactions between the alcohol and your medications." He put down the tea set in the empty space next to Will.

Will peered at the tea with scrutiny. "What are you, my psychiatrist?" he demanded.

"No, my friend," Hannibal laughed, reaching for a decanter. "I am simply a man with a strong understanding of chemicals." He poured red wine into the other three's wine glasses. "It is essential for understanding how different ingredients react with each other." Setting down the decanter, he slipped out of the room once more.

Quietly, Alana said, "See, Will? He's not out to get you. He was kind enough to make you tea."

With a curled lip, Will lifted the lid of the kettle and wafted the steam towards himself. It was a savory and admittedly appetizing scent, but he closed it quickly and did not drink from the cup.

"It could be drugged."

Beverly groaned. "We're right here, Will. Nothing can happen to you."

"We'll see."

Will let his fingers slide along of the edge of the wooden table, and the strange feeling prickled at his fingertips again. He couldn't place exactly what it was.

An enchantment, he presumed.

After a few moments of mulling over the possibilities and ignoring Alana and Beverly, Hannibal returned, carefully balancing four plates of food. Will caught a glimpse of someone shutting the door behind him, but they darted out of view quickly.

As Hannibal gracefully placed each plate in front of each person, Will felt himself polarized to flinch away from his movements. As Hannibal leaned in to set down Will's plate, which he for some reason left for last, he brushed Will's shoulder.

Something akin to electric shock filled him, and his suspicions that something was off were only confirmed.

Hannibal sat down.

"Again, it is such a pleasure to have the three of you here," he said.

He explained the intricacies of that first course, elegantly presented and expertly prepared. The words rolled off of Hannibal's tongue, and then they ate. The process repeated

for each course.

First, dandelion salad with a truffle oil dressing, served alongside yellow sweet potatoes underneath roasted rabbit. Something traditionally humble turned opulent.

The main course was wild salmon with spring onions, wild mushrooms, and black rice. Reminiscent of meals cooked over a campfire and shared with his dogs.

Dessert was bannas foster, which filled him with resentment. That was a dish were reserved for special Sunday night dinners with his father, which he was never supposed to have again.

Will choked down small amounts of the food, avoiding the tea, and made as little conversation as possible. The dinner was over before he could gather as much information as he thought he needed, but he was not willing to linger longer than absolutely necessary.

As Hannibal escorted them back out to their vehicle, his hand slid onto the small of Will's back.

"You didn't eat," he whispered, close to Will's ear. "Do you usually have such a small appetite?"

Will, stiff as a board, let out a smirk. "My appetite is strong, and I happen to love food, Mr. Lecter," he replied. "I just don't particularly enjoy yours."

For a brief moment, Hannibal stiffened and his step faltered.

Will felt a tiny glow of achievement.

A Fallen Apple

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

To Will, a pleasant morning meant solitude, black coffee, and a walk through the field with his dogs.

This was not a pleasant morning.

He was surrounded by people in a coffee shop that did not serve legitimate coffee, and Buster and Winston were left at home to stay in the yard.

If he thought about it, it had been a long while since he had a truly pleasant morning, anyhow.

Jack Crawford was with him, stirring large crystals of a light brown sugar into his drink, an unsettled look on his face. Will watched as he poured an off-white liquid from a small steel pitcher into the mug, a frown on his face.

"I thought you said we were going out for breakfast, Jack," said Will, glancing down at his own drink. It wasn't coffee, though it was similar in color. The girl at the counter had said it was carob.

He had done some strange things for the sake of his job, but Will had never expected to find himself drinking *carob,* let alone in his own time.

"We are," Jack said, though he didn't sound too confident. "Dr. Feldsburg said to make sure you were eating real food."

"I wouldn't call this food, period."

"It's good for you," Jack sighed, and took a hesitant sip. He had ordered the same thing he got for Will, perhaps in a perverted form of moral support. The look on his face once he tasted it was not at all encouraging, however.

"Probably even better for me if I don't drink it," Will muttered, his lip curling. He pushed the mug a little farther away from him. "Can't we just go to the diner? It's right there." He looked longingly out of the tinted windows of the strange little cafe, to Ruby's Diner across the street, warm and familiar.

"As much as I would love to," Jack sighed, "we can't." He stirred more sugar into his drink, took another taste, and seemed less repulsed. "You know what the good doctor said."

"He never said to avoid long standing local businesses, Jack."

Jack took a gulp this time and narrowed his eyes at Will. "But it's necessary to avoid those local businesses when you won't be able to digest anything that they serve there."

"I could digest some eggs and bacon right about now," Will sighed. He saw the girl from the counter approaching with their food.

She forced a smile as she approached, likely overhearing their conversation. "Two bowls of steel cut oats," she said, "with cashew milk and spirulina powder." She set down the bowls, along with two plates of sliced bananas and thawed berries.

"Thanks." Will didn't even try to sound sincere.

Jack smiled at her. "Ignore him. Thank you."

The girl pulled a face and walked away.

Quietly, Will said, "It's green, Jack. Oatmeal isn't supposed to be green."

Jack ignored him and tipped the plate so the fruit fell onto the oats. "You've eaten stranger things in the field."

"Out of necessity."

"This is necessity."

Will rolled his eyes and took a spoon to the green porridge. He took a decent-sized bite, and it wasn't as terrible as he thought it would be.

"No oils," Jack continued, repeating Dr. Feldsburg's advice, "no alcohol, no caffeine, no red meat, and no added sugar. Whole grains, extra greens, lots of fruit."

Will grit his teeth and took another spiteful bite of the food. He only followed the doctor's strict diet regimen when he was around his friends and colleagues, which was (sadly) more than he had originally expected.

"I would kill for something decent," he said, setting down the spoon.

Jack raised his eyebrows. "You had the opportunity," he said, in the middle of a green mouthful.

Will huffed. "I don't know what you mean."

"I think you do," Jack replied, his voice even. "I heard about your dinner at Hannibal Lecter's home. You hardly ate."

"There was nothing worth eating," he snapped back, and quickly stabbed at some of his fruit with a fork. The berries were still partially frozen, it seemed, preservations of the summer's harvest. Such were the ways of the cold seasons, he supposed.

"But not because of Hannibal's cooking, surely," Jack pressed. "The man is a world renowned chef, Will. People have *literally killed* to try and get a seat at his table."

Will swallowed his fruit, a bitter taste in his mouth. "That explains a lot."

"Will." Jack folded his hands on the table. "Hannibal Lecter is a good man and a close friend of the agency. You should be grateful that he used time and resources to cater for you. It's rare that he accommodates to dietary needs like yours."

"And what exactly makes him a friend?" Will asked. "What does he provide? *Inside information?"*

Jack leaned forward ever-so-slightly, an unintentionally threatening movement.

"Hannibal Lecter is a *good man,* Will."

"Then why don't I believe you?"

Jack sighed and looked down at his food, apparently defeated.

They ate the rest of the meal in near-silence, and when it was over, Will went home to return to the quiet. It was balance to the cacophony of thoughts filling his mind.

The thing from the edge of his thoughts prodded and pressed him for the rest of the day.

Sinful. He's sinful.

Will knew that his opinion of Hannibal Lecter was entirely separate from the thing's suggestions. It was not real, after all. It was a shadow, a remnant of things forgotten.

Still, it persisted.

Serpentine. You know serpents. You know how to deal with them.

And he did.

But Will knew that Hannibal Lecter was no serpent. That would be too obvious. The luxury and the hoard, the dragon's head and the herbs... They pointed to nothing but the obvious.

They were a facade, and they had the thing fooled, but not Will. He would see past it, eventually.

Perhaps he needed to. Perhaps it would silence the thing. Perhaps it was what was meant to be.

Will nodded to himself, and made a decision. The afternoon was turning to evening outside, and he had nothing better to do than catch the man off guard.

He stood up and whistled to his dogs. "Come on, boys," he said. "It's time to go hunting."

Winston took his place in the front passenger seat like the old days, and Buster found a new position trying to squirm into any space that was left over.

Without the others in the back, it must have been too lonely to sit there.

Will understood. Without the other dogs, nothing felt right. Nothing had been normal since the accident in the first place, but he often found himself asking some unknown power why he had to lose them, too.

He shuddered to think what would have happen if he had lost all of them.

They drove into the evening, and the sun was down when they arrived at Hannibal Lecter's mansion. The dogs were both asleep when Will pulled up to the gate. It was closed, locked, but if Will's impressions of the man were correct (and he knew they were), that wouldn't be a problem.

There was a small intercom stood next to the gate. He suspected there would be cameras somewhere, too.

He rolled down his window, and the dogs remained asleep, curled up into each other. Will stuck his head out of the window, and using his jacket sleeve to cover his hand, he pressed the button on the intercom.

He didn't say anything, but pulled his hand away. He checked the sleeve, but no residue was left on it. Nothing visible had been dusted onto the button, and that, at least, was good.

He waited with the window down, the cold air blowing into the car. It was silent outside; not a single bird was singing itself or its companions to sleep.

A few moments later, the intercom crackled, and a voice came out clear from the speaker.

"Will Graham. What a surprise."

It was Hannibal Lecter's voice, of course, accented and smooth. There was a short pause before he continued.

"I did not expect to see you back so soon. Allow me to open the gate."

Will smiled and rolled the window back up. The iron gates swung open, and he drove through.

He woke the dogs when he pulled up directly in front of the menacing doors.

"We're here," he whispered.

His voice stirred them immediately. Buster's ears perked, and Winston lifted his head, pressing his nose against the window. A small ring of fog formed on the glass around his snout, disappearing when he pulled away.

They followed him out of the car, treading lightly like they would on any hunt, but there was nothing in their body language to suggest they were alarmed. They were ready, aware of his own apprehension, but had none of their own.

Whatever Hannibal was hiding, it was well masked.

Before Will could even lift the dragon head knocker, both of the grand doors swung open. Hannibal Lecter was stood behind them in something of a grandiose stance presented humbly--angled and dignified, but welcoming, with one hand outstretched and a relaxed smile curling on his lips. He was dressed casually compared to their dinner several nights before, in a maroon sweater and well-fitted slacks.

"I see you've brought friends," he said, looking down Winston and Buster. "I suppose it does not surprise me that you are more of an animal person." He bent over slightly, allowing the dogs to sniff his hand. Winston began licking at his fingers, and a small laugh escaped Hannibal as he retracted.

Will nodded, watching curiously. "They're tolerant until aggravated." His dogs were still smelling Hannibal out, he could tell.

Hannibal's smile shrunk, but it remained still. "I'm sure they are more than tolerant of you, Will."

"You, however, might be another story," Will said.

Something flickered behind Hannibal's eyes. "I don't normally allow animals into my home," he admitted, "but seeing as they are yours, they must be treated as any other guests. Come in, please."

He reached for Will's arm to lead him in, but Will jerked away quickly. Winston clung close to his heels, and Buster hurried ahead to sniff the contents of the room.

Just as before, Will thought he saw people flicker at the edge of his vision, but they were out of sight before he could focus on them.

"Your staff are very quick," he remarked.

"Well, good." Hannibal laughed, and the sound reverberated throughout the foyer. "I will have them prepare you something. I'm afraid I was not expecting a guest, so I only cooked for myself."

Will glanced at him as they crossed into the next room. "That's fine," he said. "I'll have what you're having."

Hannibal's eyebrows raised slightly, and when he spoke, a purr of satisfaction lined his voice. "As charmed as I am that you would try my cooking again, Will, I'm afraid my meal would not suit your current diet."

"I won't tell if you don't."

Hannibal smiled then. "In that case," he said, "there is plenty extra for you." He diverted his path towards a closed door, which Will assumed led to the kitchen.

"Don't think it's because I would enjoy your food," Will clarified, picking up his pace to follow. "I'm just craving something hearty."

Hannibal opened the door to the kitchen and held it for Will. "Of course," he said.

Will followed him through, but Hannibal shut it before the dogs could follow. Will felt a short burst of panic fill him, and he hovered by the door, tempted to return to them instead of pressing on a close investigation of a new room.

"I apologize," Hannibal said, watching him, "but I must draw the line at my kitchen. The only animals allowed here are already dead." He paused a moment, and a smile lit his features. "And you, Will, are not an animal."

Nodding, slightly unsettled, Will looked over his shoulder at the door, and of course he did not see through it. He shoved his concern down this throat by swallowing a large breath of air, and followed Hannibal.

The kitchen was spacious, with cobalt blue walls and beautiful, black marble counters. Copper pots, pans, and other untarnished cooking utensils hung on the walls, and part of Will wondered if those particular items were only there for show.

Hannibal was stood at a counter island in the center of the kitchen, where a large platter was already set out. Will walked over to peer at it, and his gut roiled in both disgust and intrigue at the sight.

"Is that meat *raw?"* he asked.

Hannibal smiled, and gestured grandly at the dish. "Beef carpaccio," he said, "traditionally prepared and served raw. Though, like many others, I have chosen to sear the edges for a contrast in flavor."

Will nodded, noticing an almost purplish tinge along the edge of the meat. He had never seen beef that looked like that.

"Do you always cook like this when you're not expecting guests?"

"Always." It came from Hannibal's lips in a satisfactory purr, and for a moment, his eyes fixated on Will.

Will looked away, at the carpaccio, which was adorned with a sharp leafy green, blue cheese, and something with an appearance that reminded him of eggplant.

"Arugula, roquefort, and purple bell pepper," Hannibal informed him, and crossed over so that he was on the other side of the kitchen island, next to Will. "I will bring it out in just a moment, if you would like to have a seat at the dining table."

Will froze, and the possibility of Hannibal poisoning his food while he was waiting in the dining room deterred him from moving. He swallowed, nervously, and said, "I'll help you bring it out."

The carpaccio was only the first course. The main was a braised lamb, rich with the scents of rosemary and thyme.

Hannibal served both himself and Will one shank, and lined the left sides of their plated with thinly sliced roasted potatoes.

"The jus is perhaps the star of this particular dish," he said, ladling the broth liquid onto Will's plate. "The meat is marinated in herbs and wine for forty-two hours, and when cooked, the flavor seeps out into this." As he ladled some onto his own plate, he took in a long, languid breath, savoring the smell of his own work.

Will watched Hannibal, searching for something.

Though he didn't know exactly what he was looking for, he didn't find it.

Hannibal began cutting into his meat, but first he looked up. "Please, Will," he said. "Eat."

"This is certainly not what my doctor recommends," Will confessed, looking down at his own plate. He rued to admit it, but his mouth was beginning to water.

He *had* said he would kill for something decent, and this was more than decent. And there was no killing involved.

Hannibal smiled. "If you would prefer something lighter, I can certainly prepare another dish."

"No! No, this is fine."

Will's response was quicker than he wanted. Silently, he cursed himself.

"Spoken like a man deprived," remarked Hannibal. He lifted a forkful of lamb to his own mouth, and closed his eyes as he tasted it. The look on his face was close to orgasmic. He took his time chewing, and Will couldn't help but watch.

Swallowing, Hannibal let out a small sigh. "I ask that you, at the very least, do not deprive yourself of the first bite."

"I can't argue with that."

Will then finally cut into the meat, and took the braised lamb into his mouth with reverence. It was divine, rich and flavorful and satisfying, and a sense of bliss washed over him.

For a short moment, he thought he could see why Jack Crawford insisted that Hannibal Lecter was a good man.

For more than a long moment, he understood why people had killed to taste Hannibal's food.

The carpaccio was wonderful, of course, but something about this dish was different. It was enchanting, in a way, and the spell did not dissipate once Will swallowed.

He was quick to take another bite, and Hannibal seemed satisfied.

"You have good manners," he said, and Will could feel his gaze piercing into him. "But you are not used to such refinery."

Will huffed. "The food is incredible," he said, "but the other decadences don't appeal to me."

"Which is why I keep my dining room humble," Hannibal hummed, cutting into his potatoes. "The food is the center of attention. I do not need to distract my guests with a gaudy atmosphere."

Nodding, Will took the stem of the wine glass Hannibal had poured for him at the beginning of the meal. He had yet to touch it, but as he swirled its contents, the smell wafted towards him, and he decided to take a sip.

"What has changed, Will?" Hannibal asked.

Will sputtered as he tried to swallow the wine. Setting down the glass, he said, "Nothing." Nothing had changed.

Hannibal's head tilted, and he smiled once more, revealing sharp, white teeth. "You were hardly interested in my cooking during our last meal together. Tonight, you seem enraptured with it."

Will grimaced, and paused before he responded. "That pleases you."

"Certainly," admitted Hannibal. "But I have a sense that it is no fault of my own."

"And what makes you say that?"

"What I have prepared tonight is of no lesser quality than what I served to you last week, albeit the differences in ingredients."

Will paused before responding, choosing to take another sip of his wine. It was more successful this time, more graceful. "Perhaps this meal is more to my taste, Mr. Lecter."

"Doctor," Hannibal said.

"Hm?"

"My title is 'doctor'," he clarified. "But I would prefer if you call me Hannibal."

Will's brows furrowed. "Well, *Doctor Lecter,"* he said, "I think I prefer tonight's meal than the one previous."

"Perhaps."

Hannibal did not seem satisfied.

Clearing his throat, Will continued. "I haven't had a good meal in years."

"The meal I first prepared you was more than excellent," Hannibal protested.

"Roots and mushrooms," murmured Will. "Rabbit and fish."

Dandelions, he thought.

"You are opposed to those ingredients?"

Will wasn't, of course. His time in the wild from his hunts made him accustomed to them, and they filled him with familiarity. Hannibal's preparation of them had been unfamiliar, and the decadence with which he did tainted the memories Will had of those components.

They had been delicious, but tainted. Defiled.

What was served to Will tonight was already clearly the food of the rich. Meats he never ate when he was growing up or when he was working as a hunter, prepared in ways that he had never known.

The decadence was purely Hannibal, and the meal before had been a tribute to Will. But it was poorly executed, spelling out in a way that was certainly not Will.

"I am very familiar with them," Will evaded. "Tonight's meal, I am not."

"You enjoy new experiences, then," Hannibal said. He leaned forward in his seat, appraising Will with raised eyebrows. "You are spontaneous. You want to be excited, surprised."

Hardly, Will thought. He cut into the meat again and took another bite, conscious of Hannibal's gaze now tearing into him.

"Are you like me, Will?"

Will swallowed, somewhat shocked.

"I should hope not," he said. At Hannibal's slightly wounded look, he added, "Homogeneity is... boring."

A grin spread on Hannibal's lips. "I am sure there are plenty of differences between us." He raised his wine glass into the air, and nodded at Will. "To discovering them," he offered.

Will reluctantly lifted his glass, but he was not adverse to the toast.

He would need to know their differences if he was to uncover Hannibal's true identity.

When the meal was over, Hannibal and Will returned to the kitchen. Hannibal did the dishes quickly, which was surprising for a man who seemed to have servants.

Then, Hannibal led Will out to the land behind his house, where the dogs had somehow ended up. Will assumed this was thanks to the aforementioned servants.

Winston was curled up, asleep beneath a cherry tree. Buster was nowhere to be seen, but Will could hear him rustling in the plants somewhere.

The back, like the front of the estate, was vast, surrounded by beautiful walls that Will could barely make out in the dark distance. He could smell a variety of herbs growing, and the slight buzz he felt when passing certain plants did nothing to assuage his fear that there was something magical nearby.

Hannibal remained behind him, watching as Will wandered, searching. Buster would occasionally pop up out of a row of flowers, or Will would see him rolling around in a vegetable patch.

Will lost Hannibal's silent presence after a short while, and found himself wandering further into the property. It was walled on all sides, and he thought it would be impossible to enter or escape without having astute knowledge of the walls themselves. In a sense, he was trapped.

Hannibal had trapped him.

He was not panicked, however.

There were acres and acres of land around him, and Hannibal did not seem intent on hunting him. Will was the one doing the hunting here, and he wondered if the other man knew that.

It might have been ten minutes or an hour since he had gone outside, but he found himself in an orchard. Apple trees, still bearing fruit. It was late autumn, after all. The ground was littered with fallen apples, and no matter how careful he was with his step, they crunched under Will's feet.

Buster was was with him, darting in and out of sight, running among the trees. He had found a squirrel, most likely.

Will found himself calm, and stood beneath one of the taller trees. He looked up into the branches, and saw an apple weighing down its branch, bending towards him.

An offering.

He considered picking it, but then heard a twig snap behind him.

It was Hannibal, he knew.

A small burst of panic filled him as a thought crossed his mind, but he did not let it overwhelm him. He could handle this, and he could handle it well.

He stood on his tiptoes and picked the apple, and held it close to his chest as he turned around to face his host.

"The trees have been here for over a hundred years," Hannibal said. "I have never, in my life, tasted better apples. I would encourage you to try one, Will."

He was leaned against another one of the trees, and Winston was at his heel. It was a strange sight for Will. He had not expected his dogs to be anything more than tolerant.

Then again, if his hunch was true, it would make sense.

Will turned the apple in his hands. It was large, and in the limited moonlight, it was dark, hinting at deep shade of red. No doubt, it would taste delicious.

"How long have you lived here, Hannibal?" he inquired, keeping his gaze focused on the apple. He knew he was safe, and his heart rate stayed low. Hannibal could do nothing.

Not here, not yet.

Hannibal pushed himself off the tree and walked towards Will, and Winston stayed close to him, wagging his tail slowly. The dog was comfortable, happy in Hannibal's presence.

Winston had been a stray. Of course he was happy with someone--some*thing*--like Hannibal.

"Nearly twenty years," Hannibal told him. His voice was low, and he stopped a few feet in front of Will. "Not long at all in the grand scheme of things."

"Why did you leave Europe?"

Hannibal frowned, took one step closer. "America was calling," he said, simply. He looked closely at Will, and then down at the apple in his hands. Something burned in his eyes.

Will huffed. "You know I won't eat this."

Hannibal nodded. "You're too smart for that."

"But you want me to."

"It's in my nature," Hannibal sighed, "though I cannot force you. It would be a fruitless attempt."

"How many?" asked Will.

Hannibal blinked, moved closer still, and took the apple from Will's hands. "Enough."

"Jack?"

"Yes."

"Alana? Beverly?"

Hannibal sighed again. "It needed to be done, Will."

"You've built yourself a safety net. And an impenetrable one at that."

"Not entirely," Hannibal said, and he locked his gaze with Will's. "You are a hole in that net."

Will laughed. "I'm hardly capable, Hannibal," he said. "You have everyone on your side. I couldn't apprehend you. I couldn't hurt you. I imagine you have the entire counsel in your palm."

"More or less," he agreed. He stilled for a moment, and adjusted the apple in his hands. He twisted it, and in a display of strength, he broke it in half. "You could, of course, kill me. You possess the means to do such a thing."

"You don't seem to care," said Will.

"I'm like you, Will," Hannibal told him. "I want to be surprised. What you do to me is to remain unexpected, and I look forward to seeing what that is."

"You expect me to kill you, though."

Hannibal nodded. "Yes."

"Did you know I would figure it out?"

"I wanted you to," Hannibal confessed. "It's rare that my guests find this orchard on their own."

A slight breeze hit them both, and Will shuddered. Winston nudged Hannibal's leg with his nose, which felt like betrayal to Will. Buster was still off romping through the trees, nowhere to be seen.

"And rarer still that they identify it for what it is," Will supposed.

"Indeed."

Hannibal had the look of a lonely man in that moment, that much Will could see. Like the woman who spends her days mixing love potions, or the man who buys his way into success, he was empty.

He wanted more, he wanted to be understood. To have something won without using magic to get it, without contracts and curses.

Coercion did not seem to be out of the question, however.

"You hunt," Hannibal said, still holding the apple. "You understand your prey. You see through the eyes of monsters, Will. It is what brought you back in the end."

"Yeah."

For some reason, Will was suddenly breathless.

"Who told you?"

"Jack told me you hunted. Alana told me you were hurt badly. I have gathered the rest from knowing you." He paused, and seemed satisfied with himself. "As I said, Will: I'm like you."

Will scoffed. "You don't understand me."

"Nor you I. Not yet, anyhow."

Will shook his head, crossed his arms. Winston looked up at him with pleading eyes--begging for what, Will wasn't sure.

"You want me to know you, Doctor Lecter? To understand you?"

"Yes."

A soft answer, quiet. It was a plead, too, and Winston let out a soft whine to echo it. Will saw it, saw what Hannibal was doing. It was coercion, manipulation at its finest, but nothing like what Hannibal's *kind* were ought to do.

It was almost human.

And that was what got him.

"It's late," he said. "I'll be getting back to my car." He began walking past Hannibal, and whistled to call Buster. He knew Winston would follow.

Before he was out of reach, Hannibal grasped his arm.

"And you will return?"

Will stopped, but did not look at him. "Eventually," he said.

"You're too curious not to."

Will, perhaps for the first time that evening, cracked a smile. He was glad that Hannibal could not see it.

"I'm curious to understand what makes a fae so desperate."

Hannibal's grip loosened, and Will heard a small *thud* as the apple hit the ground. A symbolic thing--Hannibal was giving up any ideas of abusing his skills. He couldn't now.

And then, truly then, Will wanted to know why.

"Good night, Doctor Lecter."

The doctor let go, allowing Will to walk away. As he did so, he heard him say, faintly, "It's Hannibal, to you."

Chapter End Notes

I finished rewatching Season 2.... I didn't remember that ending at all! I haven't started Season 3 yet. I feel kind of shaken after the ending of the last. Let me know if you recommend giving it a shot!

The Dream Speaker

Chapter Notes

Just to clarify, my usage of folklore and mythology is very loose. Not gonna stick much to the "rules" simply because there's so many different elements to each culture's brand of magical stuff, so I'm just lumping it all together.

I use fae and creatures interchangeably. Fae is a European term, generally referring to European mythology, and but in this case I use it to refer to everything magical. Creatures I use to refer to the lesser magical beings, ones with less sentience and/or human resemblance.

So, for example, pixies would be fae because they look humanoid, but aren't very sentient. Dragons and wyvern are fae because they're quite sentient, even though they don't (always)* look human. Elves are fae, pukwudgies are fae.

Creatures are more in cryptid territory. Humans aren't really familiar with them, and even though they don't interact much, they're still Scary Stuff.

Most spirits fall into the creature category, too. They're not really sentient, mostly just pent up little balls of magic. But spirits like loa and tricksters and demons (you know, the ones that genuinely interact with humans and cause trouble or do good) are fae.

*for the sake of it, some dragons and wyvern and other dragon-like creatures can take on human forms. they have enough magic for it shhhhh

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Will had been around creatures since he was a young boy.

He had always been able to spot them, though he hadn't realized it until he started going to school and spending time around other children. It was then that he saw that this perceptions were far from the norm.

He had grown up in the South, and spent his early days exploring haunted bogs and stumbling on easily-agitated swamp monsters. He always felt them before he saw them--they made the air tingle, made his breath catch, and filled his stomach with butterflies.

They brought him joy, at first. As he grew older, his reactions radicalized, and the tingling became pain, caught breaths turned to hyperventilation, and and the butterflies morphed into beetles trying to crawl their way out of his stomach.

It took time to get him there, though. Too many bad experiences and too many close calls tended to do that.

His father had always said he was born in the gray; that was why he could see them. He lived half in their world and half in the humans' world, neither fully in the black or fully in the white.

His mother had been one of the fae, though Will had never met her. His father told him she was gentle, kind, and died trying to protect him from a world that had no space for something that lived in between.

He had urged Will to never tell anyone what he was, and he never did.

No one knew how close he was to the things he hunted, and no one could ever know. They wouldn't see him the same way again.

Most humans did not see what was not human, not physical, and so they feared them. Fae were magic, after all; they lived on a different plane than what most humans could experience. They had an advantage, being able to play on the humans' realm, do their damage, and quickly return to where they could not be bothered. Even the creatures, who were less interactive and more or less like ordinary animals, were enough to strike fear into an ordinary man.

Will's father had loved the creatures. He would have Will point them out to him on their walks through the forest around their house, and it would bring light into his eyes.

Will loved them, too.

He loved that he could find the Panti' for a prize whenever one of his baby teeth fell out, he loved that the monsters in the lake would let him stroke their scales and cling to their backs while they pulled him under the water.

The creatures would all hide from him when he brought other children out to see them, so Will ended up not making many human friends.

The fae were there for him instead, and he loved them, too, for it.

He loved that he could spot the loa perched by the offerings left for them and ask them for favors, loved that he could play with the pukwudgies hiding in the bushes.

The pukwudgie were content to talk to him and mess around with him, and they were as good as human company for him--if not better.

As he grew older, he started meeting more of the fae--different than the ones he thought he knew.

He had trouble finding them, mostly because fae were too much like humans. He could feel like them, feel for them, and it was often difficult to separate himself from them. In most cases, he couldn't tell the difference between them and humans at all, until things started going wrong.

Fae were chaotic. Unlike creatures, they didn't try to hide from humans. They tried to hide alongside humans. They worked to become like them so they could unravel them.

He noticed it first with the puckwudgie. A younger one had followed him to school one day, and Will had watched them torment all the other sixth graders. The other children didn't notice the puckwudgie, and blamed the never-ending incidents on Will.

Then, he saw a loa attack a man for entering a house without leaving a gift.

He started watching, and he saw that the fae could be cruel.

There were humans who could see creatures like Will did, but they could not feel them or the fae like him. He was alone in that, and he never told.

There were humans who taught him more about the magic in the world. Humans like Jack Crawford, who saw what evil it could bring. Will eventually learned that he could stop that evil, that he could use his peculiarities to help humanity.

He spent his adult life hunting down bad fae and corrupted creatures. He traveled the world to catch monsters where other people couldn't.

He knew there were good fae, that there were creatures that could be harmless.

But he had seen too much, had fought too many, to be careless now.

Hannibal Lecter was one of the fae, and Will just had to find out what he was, exactly.

Will returned to Hannibal's home several days after their dinner together, when it was high noon. Winston had insisted on joining him, and Buster, naturally, came as well.

A car was parked in front of the house, which had not been the case either time Will had visited previously. It was a Bentley, fitting for the sophistication of the house it was parked in front of.

Will could only assume it belonged to Hannibal.

He got out of his own vehicle, whistling for the dogs to follow after him. They eagerly trotted up to Hannibal's doorstep before him, and he wondered what made them so excited. Usually, they were refrained, and hung behind him.

It was how he had trained them, how he had needed them to be for his work.

Grudgingly, he admitted that he wasn't exactly *working* anymore.

He climbed up the few steps to join the dogs, and raised the knocker, the ring of fire around the dragon's nose. He only needed to wait a few moments before the door swung open.

Hannibal, of course, had answered the door. He was somewhat dressed down, compared to his usual attire. He wore loose-fitting gray slacks and a red sweater over a collared gray shirt. He only had one shoe on, the laces still untied, apparently in the process of putting them on.

"Will," he said, sounding surprised. "Do you make it a habit to show up unannounced?"

Will smirked. "I like to keep people on their toes."

Hannibal nodded, taking that into consideration. "I must admit, I thought you were one of my staff at the door. Otherwise, I would have thought to put myself together some more."

Will's eyes were drawn to his feet--one with a shoe, one with only a sock. The socks were black argyle, and they looked quite soft.

"Headed somewhere?" he asked.

Hannibal nodded, and held the door open further. "To the farmer's market, yes. Would you like to come inside for a moment, before I leave?"

"I suppose I would," Will replied. "I drove all the way out here, after all."

Hannibal scoffed as Will crossed the threshold, closing the door behind him. "It usually serves well to alert a host before driving an hour arrive at their door."

"More like an hour and a half," Will mumbled.

"And my point is only verified." Hannibal shook his head, and sat himself back down on the bench against he foyer wall. He tied the laces of his first shoe, and then put on the other one. "All the same, I would hate to leave you with nothing to show for your long drive. Is there something I can do for you?"

"No," Will confessed, smiling. He watched as Winston sat next to Hannibal, who surprisingly complied to the approach by scratching him behind the ears. Buster had already disappeared into the depths of the house, still content to explore.

"Oh, Will." Hannibal smiled. "I'm touched. You came to see me." It was a jest, teasing Will.

It wasn't entirely far from the truth, though.

"I came to observe you, yes," he said. "I had hoped to delve further into the details of your... nature."

Hannibal nodded. "I expected as much," he sighed, but there was no less warmth in his expression. "However, I cannot force myself to let you leave empty-handed. I insist that you accompany me to to the market."

"Do you?" Will's eyebrows were suddenly raised.

"Of course," Hannibal said. "You can help me choose the ingredients for tonight's dinner, if you so please. I would love to find something else to fit your tastes."

"Are you suggesting I join you for dinner, as well?"

"It would provide you further opportunity to observe me."

Will couldn't help but wonder what drove the fae to allow him to do so, but he wasn't about to decline.

"That sounds doable," he agreed.

"Excellent." Hannibal finished putting on his shoes and stood. "We'll take my car. My staff can watch your dogs in our absence."

Winston looked up at Hannibal and wagged his tail, and before Hannibal could tuck his hand into his pocket, Winston licked it.

"No dogs at the market, I'm afraid," he said, patting him on the head.

Will smiled, endeared.

"They'll go in your yard?" he asked.

"There is plenty of room for them there."

"Alright." Will tried to spot Buster, but the little dog had apparently disappeared within the house. "They might have some issues finding Buster, though."

"He's nothing they can't handle."

Will shrugged. He saw no reason to question the hospitality.

He bent over to scratch Winston's head. "See you when I get back," he said. "Sniff out his bad stuff, yeah?"

Winston let out a little bark, more of a "boof" than anything. Then, he padded off down the foyer.

Hannibal patted his pocket, and pulled out a set of keys. "Shall we go?"

"Sure."

Will followed him outside, where his own car was parked. He got into the passenger seat of Hannibal's. It felt strange to do so.

Hannibal started the car, and as they were driving out of the estate, he asked, "What's his name?"

"Hm?" Will was busy staring out the window, naming off the plants that he saw growing in Hannibal's front garden. Black cohosh, lupine, vervain....

"Your dog. The larger one that's taken a liking to me."

Will smiled wryly. "Winston," he said.

"Winston." Hannibal rolled the name over his tongue. "Very British."

"It was appropriate," Will laughed. "I found him when I was out hunting a wyvern in Leeds."

Hannibal's eyebrows rose as he turned onto the main road, towards Baltimore. "A wyvern," he hummed. "What did the poor thing do to warrant doom?"

Will didn't answer.

"From what Jack Crawford tells me, you don't waste your time on ordinary fae like *wyvern."*

"She wasn't ordinary," Will replied, his voice flat. "Decided to break the mold and settle herself into human society. Made herself a human form just so she could earn trust that she could rip from cold, dead, human hands."

Hannibal smiled. "That's more like it."

It put a grimace on Will's face. "What exactly did Jack Crawford tell you?"

"Not much," he confessed. "He said he found you when you were young. He recruited you, taught you what you needed to know, and you left the bureau to freelance when they weren't letting you 'go big enough.'"

"Once you see what's out there, and you know you can stop it, you aren't satisfied with subduing tricksters."

Hannibal stepped on the gas pedal as the road straightened out. Will's eyes were filled with green as he watched the surroundings zip by.

"And what exactly did you see, Will?" Hannibal asked. "What was so terrible that you had to exterminate it immediately?"

Will felt silent, unsure if he wanted to answer that question--unsure if it would be safe to.

But he felt compelled when he looked over at Hannibal.

"The Newhaven Chepi."

Hannibal glanced at him out of the corner of his eye, one eyebrow raised, and Will looked away quickly.

"A spirit of the dead," Hannibal mused. "Aren't Chepi helpful, Will? Why would you seek to eradicate it?"

Will crossed his arms, and for a second, he was twenty-two again, and Jack Crawford was still only an agent, still only his mentor.

"Jack, what are these?"

Will was in Jack Crawford's office. Despite his best efforts to keep still and respect the agent's space, he had snuck a look at the folder tossed haphazardly to the side of the agent's desk. There were photographs of brutalized bodies, dead in more ways than one.

Jack didn't look up from the report he was reading. "For the last time, Graham, we're not on a first name--"

"Agent Crawford," Will repeated. "This doesn't look like an ordinary creature case."

At that, Jack had looked up immediately. "You aren't supposed to see those." He snatched the photograph Will held in his hands, glossy and bright with the image of gore.

"I'm supposed to help you on your cases," Will pointed out. "I should be looking at those."

"Not this case, Will. It's out of your league."

"Why?" Will demanded. "I specialize in behavior. If you're having trouble figuring out why it's mutilating like that--"

"First," Jack said, "I'm the one who specializes. You're the one who watches me specialize. Second, it's not mutilating them."

There was a light behind Jack's eyes, one that was only lit when he looked like he wanted to prove something. He was going to show Will what he knew and why he *was the one in charge.*

"Then what's it doing, Jack?"

"It's talking to them. It's making them do that to themselves."

*"How?" Will frowned. "They can't--*we *can't talk to creatures. There's no common language."*

"We're guessing it's a fae," Jack replied, pulling a photo out from the folder. "Whatever it is, it's not inflicting the damage on them itself. The victims are. Over a dozen of them, now. Local cops are passing it off as mass hysteria, but everyone knows better."

Will stared at the picture Jack showed him. A woman had carved her own eyes out just before she ripped apart the rest of her body.

It looked like she was searching for something. The cuts were deep, carved like there was an intention. She was trying to remove something.

The others were, too, he saw. Jack let them pore over the photos, strictly for educational purposes.

Ten of the victims had been found in their bedrooms, two in their living rooms, and one in a gutter behind a Walmart. To Will, the connection was obvious.

It was going into their dreams.

"Traditionally, Chepi spoke to medicine people," Will said, back in the present. He glanced at Hannibal, who was patiently listening. "They would come into their dreams and show them how to heal." He shook his head. "This Chepi went into their dreams and showed them how to destroy."

"It was killing people vicariously, then?"

"No," Will replied, sullen. "They all killed themselves, not anyone else."

Hannibal was silent for a moment. "You saw that fae could bring out the worst in people on top of inflicting it on them."

"And BIEFAC wouldn't let me stop them."

"Surely, Will," Hannibal replied, "there were others who could."

"Not like I can."

Hannibal's lips curved into a wry smile.

"No, I suppose not."

The farmer's market was busy.

It took up most of the space in a Baltimore park. There were dozens stands set up selling fruits and vegetables, and even more selling crafted supplies.

"The bounty of autumn," Hannibal said, leading Will past a vendor that sold only bone wind chimes and towards a stand covered in pumpkins.

The pumpkins came in every color: gray, white, brown, green, orange, red, yellow, and even bluish. They were organized into stacks, presumably separated by variety, on top of fold-out tables. There were a few enormous, warty pumpkins sat on the ground, as well as two crates full of miniature ones.

Hannibal immediately went to appraise the selection, gravitating towards some of the green pumpkins. He picked one up and smelled it, a look of pleasure passing his face as he did so.

"Aren't those supposed to be decorative?" Will asked.

"Squash is a wonderfully versatile fruit," Hannibal answered, feeling the skin of the pumpkin before setting it back down. "It can be used in a variety of both sweet and savory dishes, as well as being used as an aesthetic boost."

Will had trouble imagining them as food, but he guessed Hannibal knew best.

Said expert looked up at the wiry man behind the table. "I see you have Hubbard squash this week. Was it a late harvest?"

The farmer nodded. "Sure is sweet, though," he said, flashing a bright and straight smile. "They're worth the wait."

Hannibal looked over his shoulder at Will. "Have you had blue Hubbard?" he inquired, pointing towards a pile of lumpy, misshapen blue-gray gourds.

"Clearly not," Will muttered.

"You'll enjoy it," Hannibal assured him. He picked up the smallest one and smelled it. "And you're right, Julian," he said to the farmer. "This is exceptionally ripe."

Julian grinned. "You and that nose," he muttered. "Take the big one, please. You're probably the only person brave enough to tackle it."

Hannibal set the squash back down. "While I am not afraid to cook with winter squash," he said, "I am hesitant to use such a large specimen. Its size implies less sweetness and a starchier texture."

Will stood next to him and peered at the stack. He picked up the small squash that Hannibal had set down and sniffed it for himself, but he couldn't smell anything. Maybe something waxy? Earthy?

Hannibal watched hum curiously, but addressed Julian once more. "How much per pound?"

"Two-fifty."

Nodding, Hannibal selected three medium sized blue Hubbards and set them on the scale. They weighed about fourteen pounds in total, and Hannibal produced two twenty dollar bills to give to Julian.

Will watched Hannibal, the man who paid over thirty dollars for a seemingly inedible fruit, in awe.

Hannibal thanked the farmer and continued to the next stand, where he smelled more produce and Will observed.

By the time they were done, Hannibal had spent more than Will's entire weekly budget on produce. And a ridiculous amount of it, at that. Will helped him carry mustard greens, oyster mushrooms, yellow apples, and what felt like a million other produce items back to the Bentley.

As they got into the car to drive back, Will laughed.

"If I didn't know better," he said, recalling their previous two dinners, "I would have guessed you were a vegetarian."

Hannibal kept an amused expression as he pulled back onto the road.

"I prefer to procure my own meat."

Chapter End Notes

I love the idea of the Panti'. It comes from Chickasaw mythology, but I couldn't find anything about it besides that it trades teeth, so I expanded a tiny bit on it.\

Also, BIEFAC is a shitty acronym I came up with on the spot. It stands for Bureau of Investigation and Extermination of Fae and Creatures.

The Agreement

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

"I do appreciate your trust, Will."

They were back at Hannibal's house. Will was watching him whack open one of the blue Hubbards with a cleaver, revealing the bright orange flesh of the fruit's interior.

"What do you mean?" Will asked.

"You suspect me to be one of the fae," Hannibal replied, his tone casual as he continued to hack the squash into surprisingly elegant, crescent-shaped slices. "In your eyes, I am a potential threat. And yet, you are comfortable in my home. You left your dogs here while you accompanied me to the market. Still you stand here, mere feet away from me as I wield a deadly weapon."

Will looked at the cleaver again, glinting in the soft, yellow light of the kitchen.

"Suspect?" he repeated. "Hannibal, I know you're one."

Annoyingly, Hannibal smiled. "And even in your certainty, you do not hesitate to remain here."

"I'm still figuring you out," Will grumbled. "Not all fae are terrible."

"But you suspect me to be," Hannibal said, certainty outweighing assumption in his voice. "After all, you found my apple orchard."

Will nodded. He knew that Hannibal had somehow manipulated his friends, but in what way, he wasn't sure. If he were an ordinary fae, he wouldn't need to worry about them. They would leave him alone if he was innocent, if they would suspect him to be non-human at all.

But he had taken the precautions to feed them magic apples.

"What exactly do your apples do, anyway?" Will asked.

Hannibal set down the knife, leaving half of the first squash uncut. It was shaped like a bowl. He turned to stir the mushrooms and yellow apples he was (lightly) sautéing.

Will had made sure they were the apples from the market, and not from Hannibal's orchard.

After pouring a dark vinegar and cooked barley into the pan, Hannibal looked up at Will.

"You expect me to tell you?"

Will shrugged. "It was a long shot."

"Ah." Hannibal took the sauté and poured it into the open bowl of the squash. "You have your suspicions, I presume."

"I know whatever it is, it isn't all-encompassing. They're not your slaves, and they're still themselves. I'm guessing you've blinded them to a certain part of you."

"Clever boy," Hannibal laughed. "Though, it's up to you to figure out what that part is."

Sighing, Will said, "I thought as much."

Hannibal placed the half-squash onto a tray and set it in the preheated oven. Closing it, he said, "And you are not afraid of me, despite believing to know of a hidden darkness within me."

"Again," Will muttered, "I don't just believe, I *know* it's there."

"Again," Hannibal laughed, turning to face him, "you only prove my point. Though, I wonder..." He took a step closer to Will, cupped his face in his hand. "What makes you so sure? How can you see what others do not?"

Will stiffened at the touch, and found himself unable to move as Hannibal tucked his fingers behind Will's ear and ran his thumb along his jawline. He avoided Hannibal's eyes, and instead watched the hand that seemed to be caressing him.

It gave him a warm feeling, despite all odds, and he suddenly relaxed.

Will laughed bitterly. "And to think I thought you couldn't use your magic tricks on me." *Guess I'm back to square one.*

Hannibal's hand remained in place as he stared intently at Will, demanding eye contact. "There's no magic in this, my dear Will." He smiled, more genuine than what Will had seen before, and his thumb drew close to Will's bottom lip.

He found the strength to back away.

"What are you?"

Hannibal crossed his arms, the smile remaining. "Why don't you guess? I'd like to see how close you are."

Will frowned. "You manipulate emotions," he said. *It makes it harder for me to read you, to become you. I can't tell what you want, not when you're like this.*

"And pray tell," Hannibal purred, "how?"

"You're some sort of incubus," he speculated. "Or something related. Your strength is in your ability to stir desire in your victims. When you have them wanting, you do with them what you will."

The fae in question raised an eyebrow. "And what makes you say that? Am I stirring desire in you, Will?"

"I don't desire you," said Will, gritting his teeth. *Not like that, at least.* "I'm not as pliable as the others are, I'm afraid."

Hannibal sighed. "A pity," he murmured. "Though, you're wrong. I'm no incubus; sexuality is not a weapon I readily yield."

Will grunted. *Damn.* At the very least, he could tell that Hannibal wasn't lying.

"Though, again, you leave me wondering," he continued, leaning against his kitchen counter, "why aren't you pliable? What makes you different from the *others?"*

Will crossed his arms and leaned against the counter, too, only half-intentionally mirroring Hannibal.

"Why don't you guess?" he mimicked. "I'd like to see how close you are."

Hannibal laughed, a throaty sound. "And you accuse *me* of being an incubus?"

The accusation--teasing, flirtatious--sent blood rushing through Will. It's wasn't fair, and it certainly was not normal. He wanted to know, desperately then, how Hannibal was able to rile him up.

"Is that your guess?" Will demanded.

"No." Hannibal stood straight and moved to his refrigerator, from which he removed a clay container. He set it on the counter and lifted the lid, revealing marinated meat.

"Humans are interesting, diverse," Hannibal said, taking a handful of already-chopped herbs from his cutting board and tossing it over the meat. "There are a million things that could distinguish you from the rest--physical or psychological."

"And which one do you think it is?" Will pressed.

Hannibal made a sound in the back of his throat, considering. "Neither," he said. "I think it's something deeper than that."

Will felt himself still.

"Why would you say that?"

"I can pick people apart very easily, Will," Hannibal replied, his tone light. "Something I suspect you can do with even less effort than I. However, I have trouble picking *you* apart."

"You're not so easy to read yourself."

"Then we both have an interesting game ahead of us, don't we?"

Dinner was the stuffed squash along with roasted pork loin. The sliced squash was arranged in a flower pattern around the pork, and it soaked up the juices. They had a mustard green salad, as well, which was surprisingly pleasant.

Will declined desert, and instead they sat outside together with the dogs.

Buster stayed close this time, perhaps worn out from spending most of the day exploring. He collapsed between Hannibal and Will while Winston rolled around in the leaves.

Will spent the time observing Hannibal and the land they were on.

No matter how hard he tried, he couldn't quite determine what he thought Hannibal could be.

Not an incubus, certainly not a dragon.

The quiet voice in the back of his mind begged to differ, and he sighed.

"Tell me about the knocker on your front door," Will said, breaking the silence that had been growing between them.

Hannibal had stretched out on his back, and was lying in the grass, uninhibited. Strangely ordinary. He watched the sky that was quick turning from sunset into twilight.

"The dragon design?"

"Yeah," Will replied. "That's the one."

Hannibal was silent. "It makes you nervous," he said at last.

"Not me," Will laughed. "Something else, I think."

"Something else?" Hannibal turned his head to look up at Will with curiosity. "Does something else inhabit your headspace?" A dark intrigue sparkled behind his eyes.

Will huffed and leaned back so he was reclined on his elbows. "No," he answered. "But it feels like it."

"Was it always there?"

"Why are you asking?" Will demanded. "So you can pick me apart?"

"No," Hannibal responded, without much hesitation. "I told you I'm a doctor. I studied psychiatry. I might be of some help."

"Now you're really asking me to trust you," Will muttered. "A fae? As a psychiatrist? I find it hard to believe."

Hannibal said nothing.

Will sighed.

"The... the thing is fairly new. The result of a trauma. It's supposed to have left by now."

"Ah," Hannibal said. "Your trauma. The same reason you're on those medications, correct?"

"And the dumb diet," Will added.

"Which you don't seem to be following."

"I blame you," Will said. "But we promised not to tell anyone, remember?"

He almost chided himself for being so friendly, but he couldn't help but feel comfortable with Hannibal. Familiar, even. He suspected it was due to the spark of magic he felt in the air, but he couldn't say anything about it without engendering Hannibal's suspicions.

He wondered what each of those little sparks did to normal people. The prickle he felt from touching the table, the snap he felt when Hannibal touched him, the warm spark he felt right then.

He wondered if they were really magic, or they were just him.

It wasn't safe to wonder such things, he reasoned.

"No telling," Hannibal agreed, smiling. "But tell me," he said, earnestly, "what happened?"

Will frowned. "I believe I asked you a question, *Doctor Lecter."*

"Ah, yes," sighed Hannibal. "Perhaps a quid quo pro, then? I tell you about my dragon, you tell me about your trauma."

"Is that a fair trade?" Will wondered. "My trauma for a piece of your decor?"

"That's for you to determine, my dear Will," he replied. "You were the one who wanted to know, after all."

Will considered it, for a moment. The dragon's head could have been something more symbolic, or it could have just been an aesthetic decision. He doubted the latter, however. The dark, medieval casting of the knocker contrasted with the rest of the house. It was the only truly occult item that Will had spotted.

"Quid pro quo," he agreed with a sigh. "You answer my question first." It was only fair, after all, since he had been first to ask.

Hannibal hummed and rested his head over his hands, looking almost adolescent as he lay watching the sky. Will noticed, perhaps for the first time, how smooth his skin was.

It looked as if age had hardly touched him, but he carried an aura of time long spent on this earth. Not old, not young; well taken care of.

"Call it a sign of gratitude," he said. "A part of my condition."

"I'll need a more elaborate answer than that, Hannibal."

Laughing softly, Hannibal turned his head to look at him. Light from somewhere seemed to strike his eyes, and Will thought they glowed maroon.

"Not all fae are born, Will," he said, his voice almost bitter. "Some of us are made."

Will frowned. "Not in my experience," he replied. He thought of the pukwudgie in the forests near his home, the elves hiding in the trees throughout Europe. They were born into their existence.

The dragons, too, he thought. Cultivated by magic, willed into existence by a sole serpentine parent. They were born of magic and later created flesh, choosing the forms that they inhabited.

"My flesh came first," said Hannibal, his voice soft. "The magic came second."

"Born human," Will whispered, "made fae."

Unlike so many fae, dragons too, who tried to make themselves human.

"A parallel," Hannibal confirmed. "The dragon at my door reminds me of the life I've been sentenced to live."

"The human life?" Will pressed. "Or the other?"

"Both, perhaps." Hannibal frowned, his eyes locking with Will's for a moment. "I wish daily that I could be either one or the other."

I can relate, Will thought.

"It would be safer, wouldn't it?" he muttered. "Less likely to be condemned by either side."

He felt calm, for a moment, honored. Hannibal had confessed to him a secret that Will had never been able to share with anyone else.

"And you, Will?" Hannibal asked, rolling onto his side. His hair, soft and light, contacted the grass before he pushed himself up. "I asked you a question as well."

Will pursed his lips, feeling Hannibal's gaze searing into him. He looked away, lying fully on his back now, parallel to the other... halfling, he supposed.

Perhaps he was like Hannibal, after all.

"I was in Austria," he said. "I met my match. I had been hunting it for months, after first encountering it in Iceland." He took a deep breath, memories of northern lights and searing cold tempting to flood him. "I got too close."

Hannibal was silent, his breathing shallow.

"Too close, Will?"

Will shifted, suddenly feeling vulnerable. It felt good, though he had never considered the feeling positive before.

"I hunt well because I can empathize with my prey," he confessed. "I... I become them, in a way. I see them, what they want, where they are. It's only a matter of getting to them."

Hannibal said nothing, though he seemed to consider the statement.

"This one... This thing was strong. It knew I could see it, and it tried to hurt me for it. It broke into my head."

"It hurt you?"

"It killed five of my dogs."

Hannibal sat up, then, looking at Buster sleeping peacefully in the space between them. Winston was elsewhere at the moment.

"And that hurt you more than anything else?" he asked.

"Maybe," Will sighed. "Probably." He sat up, too, and shook his head. "It did a lot of things. To my body, to my mind. I'm still trying to get away from it, it seems like."

"A wicked thing, indeed," he murmured. He was staring at Will again, his gaze sharp. "But nothing it could have done to an ordinary human. Don't you think?"

Will heard the question in his voice, repeated once more.

Are you like me, Will?

"Yes and no," he breathed, unsure as to which question he was answering. They were one in the same.

Hannibal seemed to know.

"You're far from ordinary," Hannibal replied. "Divine, I think. Born as neither monster nor man."

Will huffed. "Maybe both."

"No," Hannibal insisted. "Neither. I am both. You are something else entirely."

"Yes and no, indeed," Will muttered.

"We are the same, but in another sense, nothing alike at all."

Hannibal felt closer, suddenly, and Buster was no longer a buffer in the space between them. The dog had disappeared without Will's noticing, and he felt Hannibal's breath hot on the side of his face, now.

"Wouldn't it be easier," Hannibal chuckled, "if you were an incubus?" It was more to himself than it was to Will. "I could ignore this. I could blame it on magic. I could know that this was manipulation."

Will felt his breath catch, his heart hammering suddenly. Hannibal was close, the space between them mere centimeters. Will's ear buzzed from the sensation of Hannibal's breath on it, his words echoing there.

"Does the same go for me?" he asked, frozen in place. "Can I be sure there's no magic? No deception?"

"Can you?" Hannibal repeated, and his hand snaked around Will's waist, latching on his opposite hip. "Are you?"

Will said nothing.

"You trusted me," continued Hannibal, not moving any closer. "You entered my home, consumed my food. Things you would not do had you thought I was prey--or a predator, for that matter." His fingers tightened their grip. "Part of you knows, Will, that I don't operate like the ordinary fae. My magic is different, more concentrated."

Will nodded. "The apples."

"Among other things," Hannibal confirmed, "but none have I used against you. You're different, Will."

You're like me, Will thought.

Hannibal's hand on his hip felt warm, and the breathing against his ear remained consistent. He was waiting for something, clearly.

"What do you want from me, Hannibal?"

"Whatever you can give."

Will wasn't sure what he could give. He felt tense against Hannibal, uncertain and nervous. Touch, physical connection, was never something he was good with.

He placed his hand on Hannibal's and removed it from his hip, then gently used it to move Hannibal's face further from his own. When he looked at Hannibal, there was no disappointment, no anger.

"Not that," he said, pursing his lips. "I'm really no incubus, Hannibal. Not in the slightest."

"I see."

"And, despite everything, I still don't think I trust you."

"How could you?" Hannibal mused. "You don't even trust yourself."

Will was surprised at the accuracy of the statement, but he didn't let it show. He pushed himself to his feet and whistled, calling the dogs back to him.

Hannibal watched, still on the ground.

"Is this goodbye?" he queried.

Winston trotted over quickly, first reporting to Will and then going over to nudge Hannibal with his nose. Buster appeared out of a bush, leaves stuck in his wiry fur.

"No," Will replied. "I still don't know everything I need to yet."

"And I am content to let you learn."

Will nodded, hesitant to respond.

"I won't ask of you anything you refuse to give," Hannibal added, gently. He also rose to his feet, stood a short distance from Will. "If your curiosity does not extend to match mine, I don't need you to reciprocate."

"My curiosity," Will muttered. "What's yours, Hannibal? You seem to have me figured out."

Not man, not monster.

"Not entirely," he replied. "But at the moment, my curiosity seems to be fixed on your lips." He stayed still, not crossing any boundaries.

"Quid pro quo?" Will asked, amused.

"And what would you be getting?"

"Satiation of my own curiosity," Will replied. He allowed himself to look at Hannibal, and the warm feeling returned.

Hannibal stepped closer then, a hand rising to Will's face. "Dare I ask what that curiosity might be?"

Will smiled. "Probably not. I'm not so sure myself."

Hannibal's stroked Will's face with his thumb, as he had earlier, running against the grain of his stubble. It passed over his lips, inquisitive and gentle, and still, Will was warm. Perhaps, he thought, this was a physical contact he could tolerate.

He brought his own hand to hold the back of Hannibal's neck, all the while asking himself what he possibly thought he was doing. He should have been afraid, suspicious.

Hannibal was a monster, after all.

But he was also a man, and Will, as it were, was neither.

"Something else altogether," Hannibal whispered, as if reading his mind. "Something divine."

Will threaded his fingers into the hair at the back of Hannibal's head. Soft, just as he thought. He smiled, just a little.

Hannibal moved closer and placed his other hand on the small of Will's back. Looking at Will's eyes, and then his lips, he asked, "May I?"

"Why not?" Will asked.

He had already gone further than he generally would have otherwise.

Hannibal looked back at Will's eyes, and Will, for once, allowed to look into them completely. They did glow maroon, he thought, and before he could wonder at the reason for it, they were closed, and Hannibal pressed his lips to Will's.

Light, careful. Warm, a little electric. More than just skin touching skin, which was novel to Will.

After a moment, Hannibal pulled away and ran his fingers through Will's curls, pulling his head closer. He kissed him again, his mouth slightly open this time, and Will did his best to kiss back.

Hesitant, he pulled back after a few seconds.

"Not goodbye," he said, quietly. "I'll be here again, soon."

"Good."

Hannibal walked him and the dogs back to Will's car, kissing him once more on the cheek before Will got in and drove away.

The warmth didn't leave him for the entire night, and nor did his own incredulity. What had compelled him to let Hannibal kiss him, to *kiss Hannibal,* he wasn't sure.

It was by no means a magic he was familiar with.

Something told him it wasn't magic at all.

Chapter End Notes

Yeah, I went there. Feels, some fluff.

At the moment, I don't really know how to drag a legitimate plot out of this idea, so I'll have one more chapter to close up, focusing on this sappy romance.

If more ever comes to me, I'll probably write more in this AU, but at the moment, I don't feel so attached.

Keep looking forward to the final chapter!

The Harvester of Souls

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

It was a breezy day, the sky light and cool with the sun still climbing the sky. It was noon, already, but time is autumn never really felt tangible, anyway.

Alana and Beverly were on his back porch, tittering at each other as they played fetch with Buster. Winston was in the kitchen, watching Will prepare lunch.

Turkey sandwiches, nothing fancy like Hannibal could make--though, the ingredients were nicer than what Will usually dealt with. He found himself accompanying Hannibal to the farmer's market every week, and he felt remiss that it would be closing soon, for the winter.

He would find something else to do with Hannibal, he supposed.

They saw each other a few times a week, mostly at Hannibal's home. Will poked around the house as much as he could, but there was little to reveal more of Hannibal's true nature.

He found himself not caring much anymore.

Hannibal's staff seemed harder and harder to notice the more Will was there, until he was almost sure they weren't there anymore. Still, everything was always immaculate, no matter what corner of the mansion Will found himself in.

Will's house wasn't so spotless, but he didn't mind. Neither did his friends, and Hannibal had yet to see the interior of his home. There was an unspoken agreement that Will would keep his own haven, that he wouldn't invite Hannibal into his home.

He finished slathering the hand-ground mustard onto the "artisanal" sourdough and brought the sandwiches out to Alana and Beverly, bringing his thoughts to a close.

Winston preceded him through the door, darting on his longer legs to beat Buster to the stick that Alana threw.

"Ah, I love being served by men," Beverly sighed as Will handed her a plated sandwich. "Hannibal's trained you well."

Alana laughed and took her own plate. "When will you two be hosting dinner parties together, Will?"

She sounded teasing as she said it, but Will knew more than she that it was a likely reality, sooner or later.

Will hadn't told anyone about the details of his relationship with Hannibal. His friends all knew that his suspicions had all but vanished, and that he and the doctor-turned-fae were on friendly terms.

They didn't know about the kisses behind closed doors, the one night they had spent together, the nights that Will had already planned in his head to spend with Hannibal.

Maybe it was time to tell them.

Will sat down in one of the chairs next to the women, smiling to himself as he took a bite of his sandwich.

"You've got a look," Alana said, after swallowing a bite of her own.

"And not one of your looks," Beverly added, raising an eyebrow. "Lecter's really rubbed off on you, hasn't he?"

Will shrugged. "Sure," he said. "I never thought I'd eat a turkey sandwich that wasn't made with processed lunch meat before Hannibal came into my life."

The last phrase sounded innocent enough in his head, but Alana picked up on something. She set down her plate in her lap and turned to look at him.

"A month ago, you thought Hannibal Lecter was a monster," she replied, tilting her head. "Now, you consider him an influential part of your life?"

Will smirked, deciding he was ready to drop the bombshell.

"Romantic involvement tends do to that, Doctor Bloom."

Alana gaped slightly, but before she could have said anything, Beverly let out a satisfied hoot. Elbowing her girlfriend, she said, "I knew it! Will Graham's got a sugar daddy." She raised her sandwich as if in a toast. "You owe me twenty, sweet cheeks."

Closing her mouth, Alana rolled her eyes, but reached into her purse and procured a twenty dollar bill to hand to Beverly.

Will watched with raised eyebrows as she pocketed it. He wasn't expecting bets to have been placed, let alone for the two of them to take it so casually.

He was expecting a little more surprise.

"About time," Beverly added, winking at Will. "So, is he as good in bed as he looks?"

At that, Will's cheeks flushed red, and he began to regret mentioning anything.

Jack met Will for coffee, this time at a greasy diner, to Will's delight.

Will knew the questions he was going to be asked, but he still found himself unprepared when Jack set down his fork after a final bite of hashbrowns.

"So, Will. Are you happy with Hannibal?"

And Will smiled, nervously, as he poked at the scrambled eggs on his plate.

"Yes."

"Do you feel safe with him?"

"Yes, Jack."

Will thought of the warding charms that surrounded Hannibal's house, the stone guardians he had stumbled across in the garden. There was nowhere safer in the state of Baltimore, he thought.

Hannibal was as paranoid as he was, but much more equipped to deal with it.

Jack nodded, satisfied with the answer. With a wry smile, he stopped his questioning.

"It's normal for people to find themselves suspicious of people that make them...feel things," he said, looking up to meet Will's eyes. "Especially people who have been traumatized like yourself. Abandoning that suspicion is an important part of healing."

"Oh, sure. Thanks, Doc Crawford."

Will rolled his eyes, but he knew that Jack was right.

Hannibal made Will a late breakfast in bed after a night spent together.

It was entirely vegetarian.

Will didn't take much notice of it, satisfied with simply enjoying the pastries and fresh fruit. He nestled himself against Hannibal, who was sat straight against the headboard, his shirt only half-buttoned.

"I thought you didn't like sweets for breakfast," Will chuckled, pressing a piece of brioche to Hannibal's lips.

Hannibal took it gracefully, his lips closing around Will's fingers for just a moment. Chewing, and smiling as he swallowed, he said, "I thought you might prefer it today."

Will simply nodded and took another strawberry. They were entirely out of season, and still perfectly fresh and ripe. He wasn't sure how Hannibal managed it, but he didn't question.

Pulling him closer, Hannibal pressed his nose into Will's neck. "You are enjoying it, aren't you?" he murmured.

"Of course," Will replied. "I always enjoy what you make me."

Hannibal hummed, but something was off. Will wasn't sure what it was, but he sensed that he was on edge. He frowned and ate another strawberry, unsure if it would be wise to press the issue.

But the mood unsettled him, and he left most of the food untouched. That didn't seem to bother Hannibal any further, and he graciously took the mostly-full tray back to the kitchen.

Will got up after Hannibal left. It was approaching eleven, and he really did try not to sleep in so late.

But Hannibal's bed was absurdly comfortable, and they had been up rather late.

Still, it was time to rise. He cleaned up in Hannibal's bathroom, put on the change of clothes he brought for himself.

He let out Buster and Winston, who had taken residence in one of the guest bedrooms. They went out into the back gardens together, Hannibal still cleaning up in the kitchen.

Will went for a walk, counting the small stone statues hidden in the grass, meant to protect the property from unwanted creatures and fae. The garden was untouched by the approaching winter, and yet Hannibal did not grow food there.

Besides, of course, the apples, but Hannibal did not feed those to Will.

Even the herbs grown were not for culinary purposes. Will recognized them all to be useful in minor spellwork, but never in food.

Hannibal had made an effort to take Will to the farmer's market to show him that all the food he gave him was not from his garden, that he was not trying to bewitch Will with his offerings.

Except for the meat, of course.

Will still didn't know where that came from. Hannibal never told him.

He had his suspicions, of course. Hannibal was a fae, after all, and many of them were hunters.

The lack of meat in that morning's breakfast suddenly resonated with Will, and he wondered.

Hannibal could have simply decided to give Will something sweet for breakfast, or he could have done it to ensure that Will was comfortable with any revelations, if only because he would find consolation in the fact that none of those revelations were in his stomach at the time.

The thought settled on Will's shoulders, but it did not weigh him any.

He found himself in the orchard.

He picked an apple, red and beautiful, and sat beneath the tree. He waited for Hannibal to come find him.

It was some time later when Hannibal did approach him, relief coloring his pale face when his eyes fell upon Will.

"This was the last place I expected to find you," he said, that unease still present in him.

Will noted that it only deepened when his eyes fell upon the apple Will held in his lap.

"I know," Will answered, looking away from him. "Sit down with me?"

Hannibal regarded him for a moment, before nodding and settling in next to him. Will immediately rested his head on his shoulder, which made Hannibal sigh.

"Why are you here, sweet?" he asked, bringing a hand to tousle Will's curls.

Will turned the apple in his palm.

"I'm not sure," he replied. "Not fear, but not good sense, either. I'd say suspicion, but I'm not really feeling that negative about it. Curiosity would imply that there was more I didn't know."

Hannibal made a small sound in the back of his throat. "What do you know?"

"Nothing with full certainty," Will said. "But I fear that I would be better off with this apple inside me were you to confirm anything."

Hannibal did not reply, though his body stiffened some.

"I know you planned to tell me today," Will sighed, "but I don't know if I'm ready. If I'll ever be. I've spent my life running after and running from things lesser than you."

Swallowing, Hannibal nodded. "I'm aware of that." He closed his eyes. "You needn't stay here. If your curiosity with me is over now, leave, and I will not pursue you further."

Will only laughed and rolled the apple around some more.

"Hannibal," he said, "you told me that your apples are powerless unless taken with free will. Has anyone ever taken one freely, knowing fully what they do?"

"No." Hannibal sounded breathless. "No one has ever known what they do."

Will nodded, smiled.

"I don't mind being the first."

He bit into the apple before Hannibal could stop him. It was sweet and crisp, better than any other apple he'd had before. He found himself savoring it, wondering what it would be like after he swallowed.

And when he swallowed, he felt as if his question hadn't been answered.

He didn't feel different at all.

Hannibal was staring at him intently, eyes wide and horrified.

Will frowned and tossed the apple aside carelessly.

"I guess I did know what you are," he chuckled. "It doesn't work when someone knows?"

Hannibal blinked, his gaze darting between the fallen apple and Will.

"I suppose not," he replied. "The whole purpose is to conceal my identity. It won't do anything to make you feel better about it, as you implied."

Will nodded, pursing his lips. "Well, damn," he said. "I guess I don't feel any worse. Maybe if you say it out loud."

"I'm hesitant to do so," Hannibal muttered, glancing at him sideways.

"I don't think I'm going anywhere anyway." Will pressed closer to him, resting his head on Hannibal's shoulder once more. "Even if you are a bloodthirsty people-eater."

Hannibal's sharp bark of laughter surprised him.

"What?" Will demanded.

"I wouldn't have put it so blithely," Hannibal replied, smiling at him. "Generally, folklore would peg me as a reaper--not a 'people-eater.'"

Will swallowed, then. "A reaper? I thought you were--I don't know. Closer to a wendigo."

Hannibal raised an eyebrow. "I don't eat human flesh, my darling," he said, placing a hand on Will's thigh. "I consume their souls, once their time has come. Those that bargain with me are entered into my service--temporarily, at least."

"Well." Will put his hand over Hannibal's, lacing their fingers together. "I guess I didn't know. Not entirely. What's the meat, if it's not people?"

With a laugh, Hannibal pressed a quick kiss to his cheek. "You thought I would feed you human flesh?" He chuckled again, as if startled by the absurdity.

"Well, yeah."

Hannibal kissed him again, closer to the mouth. "There's a butcher in town I go to for all my meat. I can take you there, if you wish."

Will sighed, then, relieved.

"I'd like that." He turned his head to kiss Hannibal fully, and his lips still tasted like the pastries they had. "But why were you so nervous this morning? I was worried."

"I had planned to tell you today," Hannibal answered. "I didn't know how you would react upon learning I had lost my mortality years ago and survive off of harvesting the souls of

dead men."

Will wanted to ask how Hannibal lost it, how that happened to him, but he decided that it was an issue he'd press at a later date.

"So, you don't really need to eat regular food?" he asked instead, teasing.

Hannibal grinned at him.

"Am I not allowed to fall victim to the desires of the flesh?"

"Considering you're both monster and man, I'd say that it's fair that you are."

They stayed beneath the apple tree for a while longer, sweet with the other's company.

Will had nothing to fear but the danger of growing too used to Hannibal's touch and the comfort of finer things.

He found that it did not frighten him so much.

Chapter End Notes

And that's the end?

I wish I could do a better job of tying this one together, but it's been so long that I've worked on it, I feel detached from it.

I do hope you enjoyed. Maybe I'll bring this one back someday. I do like the premise.

End Notes

If you appreciate being able to easily access my fics and those of literally every author on this site, I would strongly advise that you fill out this form to tell the FCC that you aren't cool with data discrimination, which is a proposition that would make it impossible to easily access sites that aren't run by companies loaded with cash.

Please drop by the Archive and comment to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!